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Development and validation of a Scale on Ontological Identity (OIS)

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Abstract

Introduction: Having three sub scales, the Ontological identity scale (OIS) was designed based on Erikson's opinion about Universalist – Humanist identity, teachings of eastern and western philosophers and Islamic figures on the issue of ontology. **Purpose:** The present study aims to investigate the development and validation of Ontological identity questionnaire. **Method:** 230 individuals with the age average of 22 years old were randomly chosen for the sample of the study. **Results:** The exploratory factor analysis revealed that this scale has 3 components. The total Cronbach's alphas coefficient of this scale was calculated 0.81. Also, a positive and significant correlation coefficient was found between OIS and PIL scales which in turn validated the validity of the measurement scale. **Conclusion:** thus OIS scale is a useful scale for Ontological identity evaluation.

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Keywords: development, validation, scale, ontological identity;

1. Introduction

One of the psychologists who have deeply worked on the subject of identity is Eric Erikson (1968). Erikson defines identity as a feeling of involvement with the past and orientation for the future. He believed adolescence to be a stage of development in which the search for values and beliefs begins. “Who am I”, “where am I going to go?” and “what will happen to me?” are among the questions which are raised at such a stage. Erikson discussed the concept of identity and its descriptive and structural aspects using different terminologies in the first chapter of the book “Identity: youth and crisis”. Phrases such as “Universalist – Humanist identity” and “eternal identity” can be seen among such words (Waterman, 1988).

Some eastern, western philosophers and prominent Islamic figures believe that the understanding of questions like “where did we come from?” “Where are we living” and “where are we going to go?” helps human see himself and others as high as eternity and start an unending endeavor for his eternal life. In order for human beings to attain such an identity, they must answer a series of questions related to the philosophy of life such as “who am I?”

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meaning “what is my status as a human being in the universe?”, “where did I come from?”, “why did they bring me here?”, “where am I going to go?” and so on. It is natural that the inability of answering such questions leads to identity crisis. Heidegger believes that among all creatures, it is only human who can think and ask questions about himself (Wall, 1978). Heidegger (1972) says that we should consider that human being ontologically exists, looks at the world, pays attention to it, cares his existence and considers his existence as his own problem and concern and, in this respect; he differs from other living things. Ontology refers to the recognition of human being position in the world and the identifying of the meaning of human being's life. There are other philosophers in eastern philosophy such as Mollasadra and Molana Jalaledin-Balkhi who worked on the understanding of the three major aspects of human life; namely; the origin of life, the philosophy of being and its destiny. They also believed that thinking about these subjects is one of the most important concerns of mankind (Mohammadi, 2003). Imam Ali (peace upon him) (618) is one of the prominent Islamic figures and the first Imam of Shia'yan, who discussed this issue, saying in Nahjolbalagheh: "may God bless he who knows where he comes from, where he is, and where he will go". The reanalysis of human status in the universe is a great means for analyzing the ontological identity. the ontological identity means the belief the individual bears about the origin of life, philosophy of being and the end of life.

This awareness creates a great feeling of bond with universe, a feeling which helps him get to mental and physical health, life satisfaction and happiness (Eckstein & Kern, 2002). The present study aims to make a scale for ontological identity measurement.

1. Method

1.1. Statistical population

The statistical population in this study was composed of all students currently studying in Tehran University of Medical Sciences in 2009-2010 academic year from among of which 230 subjects (197 female and 33 male) were selected by simple random sampling. The age average of the individuals in the sample group was 22 years old and the standard deviation was calculated 3.22.

1.2. scales

1.2.1. Ontological identity scale (OIS)

This scale includes 28 items within a 5 degree Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) according to three dimensions of "where do I come from", "where I am" and "where I go to" having been made on an ontological viewpoint. (Items 1 to 9, for the dimension of "where I come from"; items 10 to 18, for the dimension of "where I am" and items 19 to 28, for the dimension of "where I go to"). No items had to be reverse-coded. Sample items are: “My coming to the world is not accidental and there is logic behind it”(where I come from), "Despite all the misery and difficulties, human beings can attain great purposes" (where I am) ,"I like there to be a world after death but I'm not sure about it"(where I go to). This scale was tested on 70 individuals as a pilot study and the Cronbach's alphas coefficient turned out to be 0.78.

1.2.2. purpose in life questionnaire (PIL)

The purpose in life questionnaire (PIL): purpose in life was tested through the purpose in life questionnaire (PIL, Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1969). This questionnaire was translated to Persian by Cheraghi, Oreizi and Farahani (2008). This questionnaire tests the individual feeling of meaning in life. This scale contains 19 items. Cronbach's alphas were .92 in this Sample.

2. Findings

2.1. Validity

In order for the face and content validity of the measurement scale to be tested, the items of ontological identity scale were analyzed by 5 Isfahan and Tehran philosophy and psychology professors and the final 28 item questionnaire got prepared upon their agreement. The purpose in life questionnaire (Crumbaugh & Maholick, Cheraghi, Oreizi and Farahani, 2008) was used to determine the convergent validity of the Ontological identity scale. This was tested using both questionnaires on a sample group of 50 individuals (25 boys and 25 girls). The correlation coefficient between these two sets of scores was positive and significant ($r = 0.42$, $P = 0.001$) which shows the convergent validity of this scale. The exploratory factor analysis with Varimax rotation was used In order to test the construct validity of this scale. The Kaiser-Guttman criterion was calculated 0.89 which shows the adequacy of the sample. Also, the Bartelt test had significant results which indicate the disunity of correlation matrix between items. The results of the exploratory factor analysis are shown in table 1:

Table 1. Factor loadings of the Ontological identity questionnaire

Number of items	Item content	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
1	where I come from	0.42	-	-
2	where I come from	0.51	-	-
3	where I come from	0.48	-	-
4	where I come from	0.62	-	-
5	where I come from	0.53	-	-
6	where I come fro	0.72	-	-
7	where I come from	0.63	-	-
8	where I come from	0.52	-	-
9	where I come from	0.73	-	-
10	where I am	-	0.42	-
11	where I am	-	0.38	-
12	where I am	-	0.54	-
14	where I am	-	0.72	-
15	where I am	-	0.42	-
16	where I am	-	0.53	-
17	where I am	-	0.61	-
18	where I am	-	0.59	-
19	where I go to	-	-	0.81
20	where I go to	-	-	0.71
21	where I go to	-	-	0.51
22	where I go to	-	-	0.42
23	where I go to	-	-	0.61
24	where I go to	-	-	0.54
25	where I go to	-	-	0.53
26	where I go to	-	-	0.67
27	where I go to	-	-	0.62

As it can be seen, 26 out of 28 questions have significant Factor loadings (≤ 0.3) and only the two items of 13 and 28 are omitted which gives an explanation on 43.32% of the total variance.

2.2. Reliability

In order for the reliability of the Ontological identity scale to be tested, a 3 week interval Test-retest was given to a sample of 30 university students. The results of such an analysis indicated that this test was positive and significant concerning stability and correlation coefficient ($p=0.001$, $r=0.68$) which shows a desirable reliability of this scale. The Cronbach's alpha was used to test the internal consistency. The total reliability coefficient was calculated 0.81. This was calculated 0.83, 0.79 and 0.84 for questions number 1 to 9 (the "where did I come from?" component), 10 to 18 (the "where am I living now?" component) and 19 to 28 (the "where will I go?" component) respectively.

3. Conclusion

The finding of the study indicated that the Ontological identity scale has a desirable reliability and validity for the Ontological identity measurement. The reliability of the Ontological identity questionnaire was tested through both Cronbach's alpha and Test-retest and the calculated coefficients were 0.81 and 0.68 respectively. Also, the validity of this questionnaire was tested through concurrent validity and exploratory factor analysis. The concurrent validity was also tested through purpose in life scale and the correlation coefficient was significant (0.42) between the Ontological identity and purpose in life questionnaires ($P=0.001$). The exploratory factor analysis with Varimax rotation revealed that this questionnaire has three factors which determine 43.32 of the total variance. As a result, the Ontological identity scale has a desirable reliability and validity. Using this scale it will be possible to establish relationship between philosophy and ego psychology and to measure the highest level of human identity, i.e. ontological identity.

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